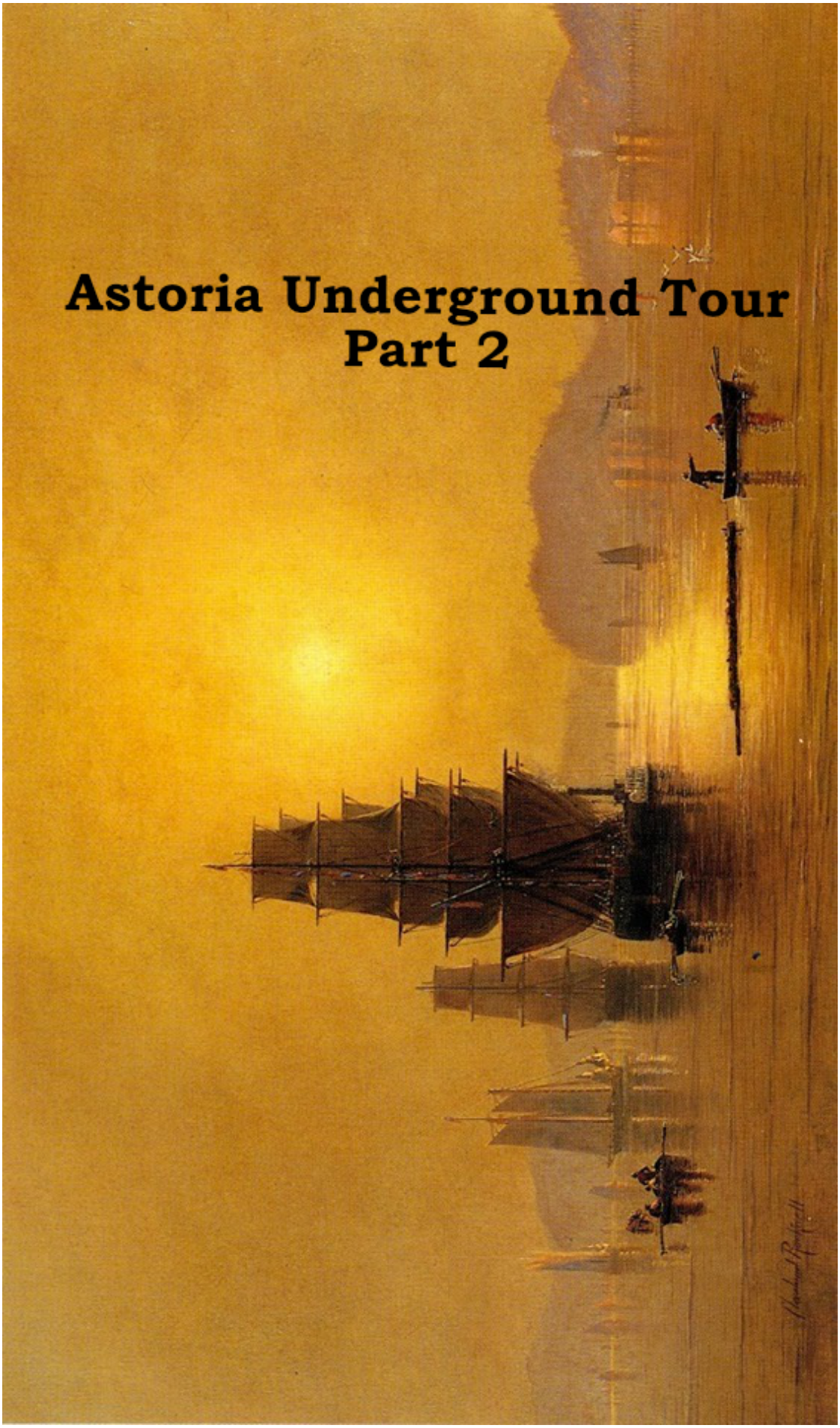
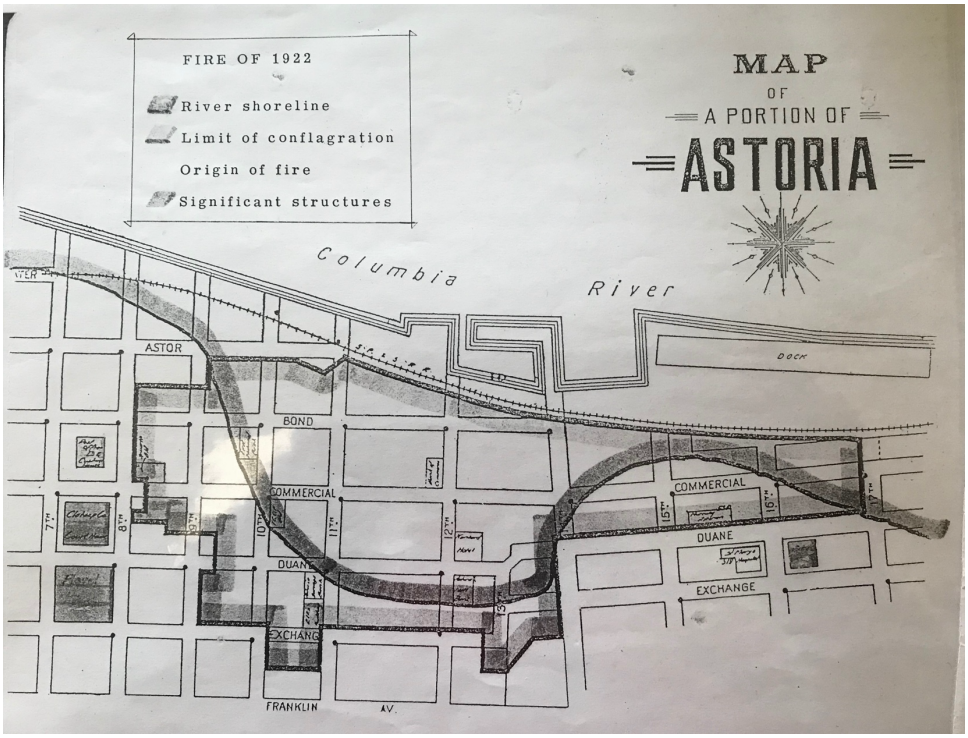
Astoria Underground Tour
Part 2



Astoria Tour Part 2

1. Start of tour at Pit next to State Hotel (1)

It is from this point where one can best view where the huge fire of 1922 started. It began about 2: 10 am on December 8 from where the back of the CURRENT STATE HOTEL is right where we are standing. The Copeland Investment Company was the original Owner of this building which was operated as the Hart Hotel from 1924 through 1934.



Two deaths were reported. One committed suicide by hanging from a pier, (the coroner believed the man hung himself out of fright), and a prominent banker/auto dealer dropped dead while trying to save his models T's from the fire. The losses were great. Not only did the merchants lose all of their regular stock, but Christmas stock had just arrived. Two thousand persons were homeless. All of the grocery stores burned, so there were no obtainable food supplies and the City was cut off without banking facilities. It is reported that Washington residents looked across the river and helplessly watched their money burn up. Over 24 solid blocks burned (9th-15th, Exchange to the water 's edge, plus). It is also interesting to note that while three churches were in the direct path of the fires, none was burned. In each case the fire was either checked just before the church was reached or veered around the house of worship.

Some people contributed the big fire to a radical outcrop of the KKK. One theory was that the KKK had hung a man and burned his business to hide the crime--unfortunately, the town went with it. In the panic of the fire many people ran from their homes with little on. One man was seen with just his toothbrush in hand, another with just a water vase. In East Astoria it was the Milkman who ran up and down the streets yelling the town was on fire.

The fire of 1922 was not Astoria's first fire. The town was destroyed by an earlier fire on July 2, 1883. that fire swept the entire waterfront and destroyed all of the buildings.

Because there was a lot of money in the community at the time, the buildings, were rebuilt almost overnight. During the progress of the fire, a large amount of liquor was taken from the saloons in the path of the fire and carried to places of safety only to be stolen by the rougher class of onlookers. Drinking was kept up throughout the night and carried into "Swilltown". During the days after the fire, many incidents occurred between the "Swilltown" roughens and the businessmen of the community. It got to the point that many of disreputable characters who lived in "Swilltown" were given notice to vacate Astoria and put on boats to Portland. THEIR CHOICE WAS TO LEAVE TOWN OR BE HANGED. NOT A DIFICULT DECSION I WOULD BET…

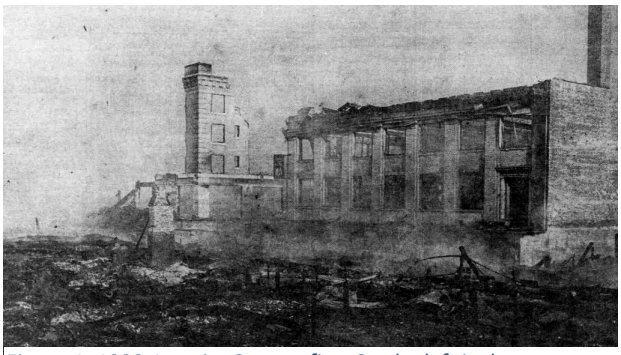


Figure 1. 1922 Astoria, Oregon fire. On the left is the remnants of the Weinhard Hotel and on the right is what remained of the Astoria National Bank.

2. 11th and Marine Drive as we walk to corner of 11th and Marine *As you come up ramp to sidewalk on Marine before crossing the street*

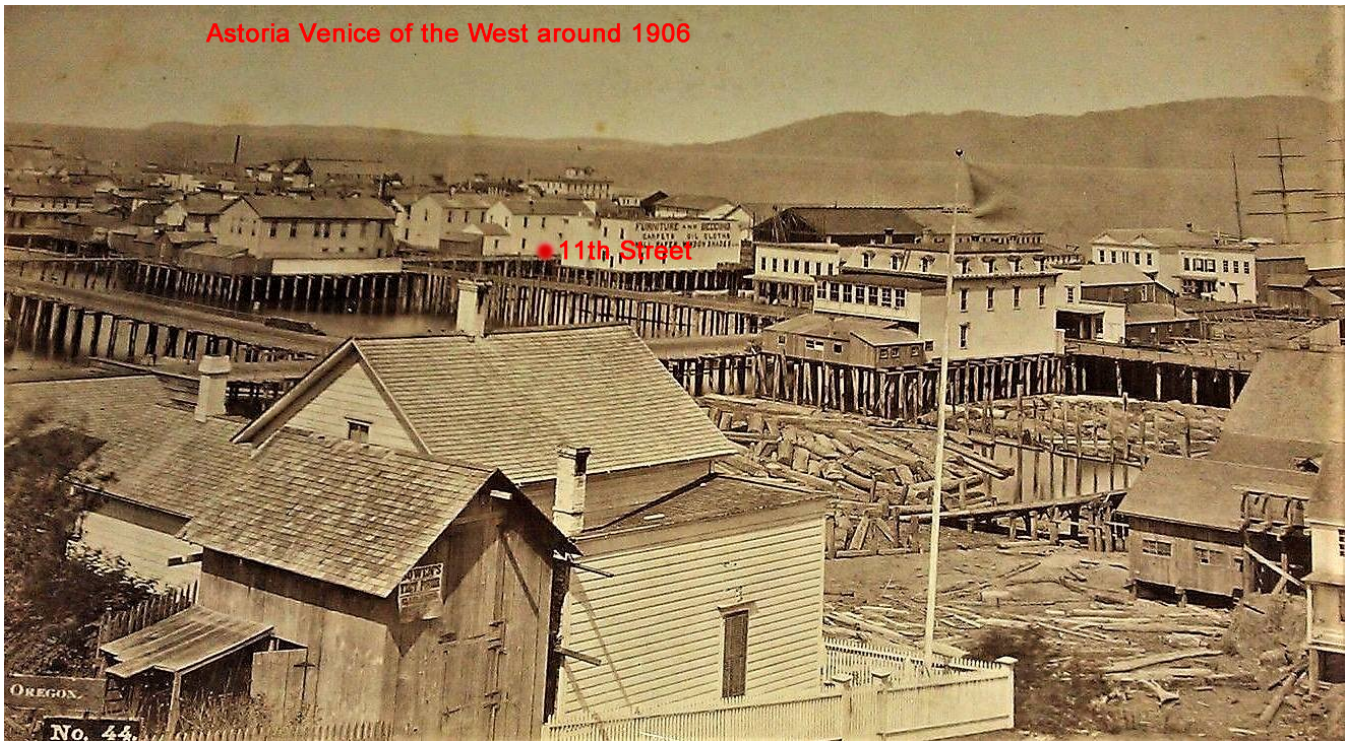
Note how well the Sears Building (FORMER CITY TRANSFER BUILDING Page 36 Built 1936) with its Art Deco style architecture (vertical lines) blends with the Moderne style of the MAKI BLDG (Restoration Hardware) Page 56) BUILT 1946. (horizontal lines). The Art Deco style was vogue from about 1925-29; the Moderne Style in the mid 1930's. Astoria's downtown is dotted with buildings from both periods.

3. Corner 11th and Marine Drive COLUMBIAN THEATRE (post-fire). This used to be the Riviera Theatre. Many Astorians remember paying a nickel and sitting through three feature movies in a row. Riviera Building is noted for its crenelated parapet, Mediterranean roof tiles and arched openings. (PAGE 34) BUILT 1925

The Sanborn Dock Company announced plans for the erection of a theatre and business block on their property at the northwest corner of Eleventh and Bond Streets on December 24, 1924. Construction was completed in late May and on June 2, 1925, a gala grand opening of the beautiful, Spanish-Moroccan style theatre was held. The building currently houses the Columbian Theaters, Columbian Cafe, and Wet Dog Cafe. (*comment about the new name and history of Wet Dog as you walk to foot of 11th). Walk down to foot of 11th*

4. Foot of 11th and River

The railroad trestle here gives the best sense of the planked streets in early Astoria. One little girl, arriving by train to Astoria found the town very frightening due to the large gaps between the, boards on the pilings. (Plus, many boards were loose and bounced about when people walked on them or cars and carriages went



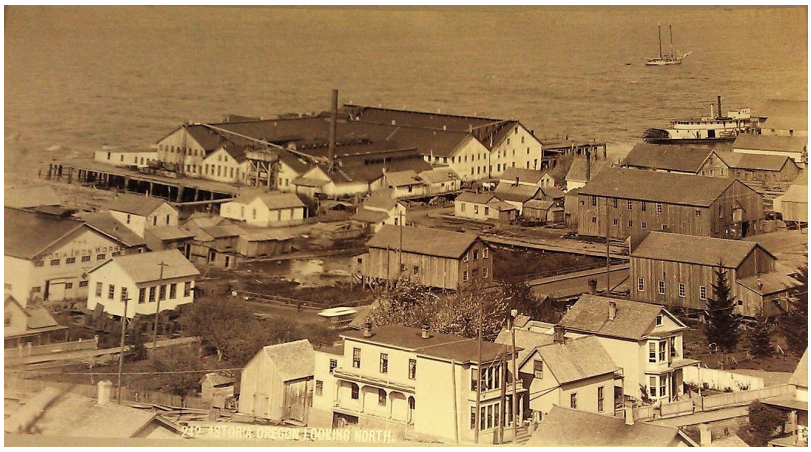
over them). After living here, a while, she got used to it and even played games through the gaps by dropping things onto people going under the streets in small boats. Sometimes she would drop “Water Bombs” and run to the nearest crowd. Streets were not filled until 1905--and not fully until after the 1922 fire. Directly west of Pier 11 stood PARKERS old dock (1851). This was the site of the first dock in the City

Pier 11 is a SANB0RN WAREHOUSE (Pre-fire) located on FLAVEL’S DOCK. It was moved to its present location about 1925. For many years it was a feed store and little steamers docked under it. Passengers reportedly boarded through a hole in the floor

Note here the SANBORN BUILDING. This is the only (not added on to) full block building in Astoria. In the center of this building was the Amato Supper Club with a wooden dance floor. (If open, go in). This was the place where officers and guests went during WII for dancing and drinking. This was Astoria’s most elegant night spot, and the walls were decorated with Hawaiian scenes. (This area is now used as a machine shop and Parking Garage).

Looking to the east you can see Pier 12. This is a good representation of what most of the downtown corridor looked like prior to the fire in 1922. What most people do not realize is that in this part of town the tide flats and river ran up to Exchange ST almost 5 blocks up the hill.

5. Corner of 10th and Astor.



Looking West from this point was the part of town that most church going folks did not frequent. Better known as Swilltown Astor street was famous for its saloons and female boarding houses. It was the home of the cribs, crimps, pimps, and toss pots. Cribs were the little cubbyholes the prostitutes performed their services. crimps were the toughs who kidnapped and shanghaied men, and we all know what pimps are. Every business along Astor street had a trapdoor for emptying garbage, but often drugged men were lowered to ships through these. "Toss pots" were what the ladies of the night called drunks. In 1877 there were over 40 saloons in Astoria

A story was told of drunken party held in a tavern which shared space with a mortician. When these drunken revelers exhausted the supply of liquor at the bar, they discovered barrels of a fluid they thought was alcoholic. It proved to embalming fluid. They drank it and died. While the bodies were still warm, a crimp sold them to a ship’s captain who did not discover they were dead until far out to sea.
Looking down across the parking area you can see a building that currently is called the Smoke House Butcher Block (page 260). The original owner of this building was Anna Messenger. The upper floor was used for the Douglas Hotel, while the ground floor housed retail businesses and offices. This structure, built as a hotel, is reflective of trends prevalent during the historic period.

It is said the hotel was run by Ann’s son and it was one of the more popular bordellos. Below was a hardware store. When a gentleman came in and asked for a screw they were sent upstairs. It survived the fire and was one of the last surviving brothels in Astoria’s red-light district

In 1918 the U.S. Government told Astoria to clean up or it would boycott it. In 1924 the Grand Jury found the moral conditions in Astoria appalling. Threats didn't clean up Astoria however, and the red-light district on Astor Street thrived well into the 40's and 50's. One senior citizen recalls how her father was glad that the

prostitutes were here to take care of the roughens pleasures ... because of them, his daughters and wife were out of danger of being raped.

Another story is told of how students of the Catholic school in Astoria were constantly selling tickets to bazaars, etc. to raise funds. They used to sneak into "Swilltown" because they knew they could always sell an entire book of tickets by knocking at a fancy house door after noontime, as these generous ladies of the night were usually seated in their parlors socializing at this hour. The ticket selling to the prostitutes came to a screeching halt when one of the ladies of the night decided to show up at one of the bazaars.

Bridget Grant Story
Title: Irish Grandmother head of biggest family of Crimps
Location or Station: *Grant House over river by Astor Street*
Source of the Story: *Cumtux 1988 Sum, 1988 Win, 1987 Fall, 1989 Sum, 1986 Spr, 2002 Sum, 2012 Fall and The Oregon Shanghaiers by Barney Blalock*
Key People in Story: *Bridget Grant Mother, Peter Grant Husband, 8 Grant Boys, Laura McCormack, Daughter Sophie and August Iverson, James Cook*
Support Graphics:
Summary of Events: *Bridget and her husband Peter moved to Astoria from Gloucester MA in 1878. She had 1 daughter and eight boys. Peter was a fisherman and a former saloon owner, and the family built a large home over the river close to the wharves. It was plenty big enough to house this large family as well as numerous transient sailors. They called the home the Grant House.*

However, their life took a big blow when Peter was dragged into the river while untangling his nets on the Dock near their home and drowned. Well Bridget being of full Irish decent found that she needed a way to support her large family. So with the help of her eight big strapping boys she started a new business. So with their Portland house located in Portland (also called the Grant House) as well as their Astoria house, they started drugging and shanghaiing many of their guests at both Rooming houses. It was rumored that they would transfer many of their former guests through a trap door that lead to the tide land underneath the wooden roads above. The term for this is a crimp.

The Grants kept their family business under the radar of city officials but imagine this 5' 4" lady knocking down these male deserters and shipping landlubbers. In the early 1880's shipping Sailors was becoming a profitable business and several others also joined in. Some like James Cook even tried to get the city to license the sailors' Boarding house runners to lessen competition. However, many found these boarding houses were very lucrative. In fact, Bridget Grant's best friend, the widow Laura McCormack decided to open the Hamburg House, a hotel on water street (now Commercial ST). She ran this operation with her daughter Sophie and an overly large Swede named August Iverson. However, all of these establishments used some of the local punks and jail birds as runners.

Side Notes:
Shanghaiing or crimping is the practice of kidnapping people to serve as sailors by coercive techniques such as trickery, intimidation, or violence. Those engaged in this form of kidnapping were known as crimps

6. Corner of 10th and Commercial

By the 1980's Astoria's economy had pretty much tanked. The town was quickly becoming run down and people were leaving the area. The population dropped from over 14,000 in the 20's to below 10,000 by 1983. By 1987 many residents began to realize that things needed to change. The

CCHS#11,116-935 / Frank Woodfield

The business district of Astoria after the fire, as seen from Ninth and Commercial streets. Two years later, after significant rebuilding the town put on a combination celebration of Fourth of July and the resurrection of Astoria with a parade and the theme "From Ashes to Concrete." But the combination of the destruction of downtown, and the loss of the Hammond mill to fire earlier in the same year, hurt the town for years.

good news is Downtown Historic District contains 130 buildings and three sites, of which 89% were constructed prior to 1947. Of the 23 structures built since then, eight are considered compatible, including an International style church. On Commercial Street, the main thoroughfare in downtown, the northern facades remain unbroken from Eighth to Fourteenth Streets. Ninety percent of the buildings on either side of the street were constructed by the end of the secondary period of development. Less than twenty buildings within the entire district have been demolished or destroyed since 1922.

So, in 1998 the entire downtown corridor was placed on the National Register of Historic places. This gave the city the ability to provide financial resources for businesses to improve their properties and reclaim the historical look of the original city.

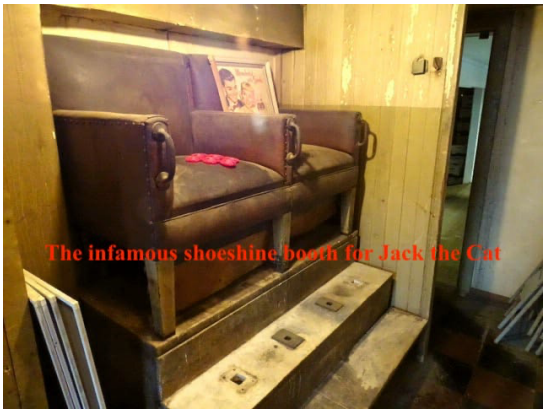
We have three buildings that show how this has worked over the last 20 years to change a "used to be town" into the gem you see today.

The first is across the street. Originally called the Sanborn Bldg. built in 1923 it had its facade covering the transoms of the original structure, as many were. As you can see by the time Bank of America had moved in it had little historical value. Using programs like the Special Assessment program and other federal and local grants they converted this building back like it was before. Special Assessment allow a 10 YR reduction in Property Taxes if the historical renovation is completed. Astor hotel saved over half a million dollars.

Next door to us is another building originally known as the Allen Bldg. Again, it was converted to modernize it. By using another program called Diamonds in the Rough they were able to return it to its original look as when it was built in 1923. Both Buildings remodels brought back the upper windows known as transoms. What are transom windows and why are they important? Actually, it is a matter of heat management. If you notice, there are some transom windows that are open. This allows the airflow of warm air on the ground floor to escape through the transom windows above. Air conditioning certainly was not available, so this was an easy way to maintain comfort during warmer days.

Across the street is the Odd Fellows Building. Not discouraged by the fire, Beaver Lodge of Odd Fellows announced plans to rebuild on the site of their former temple, January 5, 1923. This Building was dedicated April 5, 1924 and was the first fireproof lodge structure to be dedicated in Astoria since the fire. It is a great example of the style of building built right after the fire that still has most of its original style. (*Can anyone tell me who were members of the Odd Fellows Lodge? Answer any trade that was not already a trade. Hence Odd Fellow).*

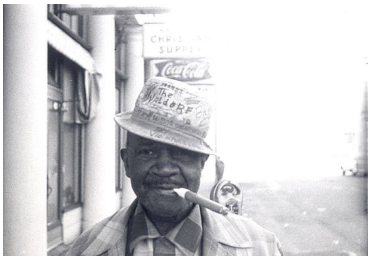
7. Between 11th and 12th on Commercial



Next to Fin Ware is **Salon Verve. Now a beauty shop it was called The Commercial Barber Shop** where the original barber shop that Jack the Cat shined shoes downstairs. There used to be a staircase that went downstairs to the area now under the parking lot on the Southeast corner of Marine Dr. and 11th. Clement's Boston Store, a men's furnishing emporium, was a tenant from 1926 through 1962 where God Father Books is now located. The building is called the Kinney Building.

This was also the area were Jack the cat gave shoeshines. He was very unusual character he was here in the 50s in the 60s. And he worked underground and lived there. If you looked in the room where he lived below this shop you would see where he had his chair set up where he could do his shoeshines there was always a cold soda off to the side waiting for every customer.

And that's what brings us to this "calling" room. This is what we referred to in the outer sidewalk area as a squatter spot. You would find a place underground that was relatively dry and hopefully had some heat coming from other buildings and you would set that up at your place to live. It's just that you didn't have a normal front door you would have to come and go underneath the sidewalks.



Picture taken by Erik Swedberg

One of his regular customers was Bill Van Dusen who owned the Pepsi bottling can company. Jack always made sure that he'd have a Pepsi or a 7-Up available when Mr. Van Dusen come in to have a shoeshine. The reason he would come down into the basement because upstairs was where the barbershop was. It was located on commercial street, and it had three barbers working upstairs with about

a dozen chairs lined up with most people sitting around reading playboys pretending like they weren't interested.

In the door at the back of the shop they went downstairs to where Jack had his shoeshine store set up. He would get jobs from waiting as customers who waited to get their haircut.

Looking at the space \Jack lived you'll notice is a bed and that's probably where Bill spends his nights. You'll also see that there's a phone booth in the room, Bill worked at night after his day job of doing shoeshines.

Jack was the only African American citizen living in Astoria during the 50s in the 60s. And it wasn't because of race but other reasons we believe that he decided to stay and live underground. He would come up during the evening times to go up and down the street and extend peoples awnings over there storefront windows or bring them in if there were storms forecast. He didn't go to the grocery store people went shopping for him and brought him the supplies that he needed.

If you sat in this room, you could feel the cement and you sometimes hear the buzz of the streetlights outside you wonder what an odd lifestyle this would be. However, for Jack it was very comfortable since he used to be a Navy submariner in a past life. Living in tight quarters without windows or daylight or sunshine was nothing new to him in fact during his time in the service he grew quite comfortable with it. So, if you sat in this room, you would feel like you could be in a submarine underneath the water deep hidden from everybody. Instead, you're hidden away from the city above you.

We don't know a lot about Jack other than what a few old timers recollect. There are some old tombstones that were found underneath the streets near a company that made tombstones. Nobody really knew Jack 's last name but it had the slogan of a sailor at the bottom of it. And as they say about sailors they want to go down with the ship.

Astoria Clowns Out House

Yeah, Jack used to work nights that's why there was a phone booth in his room he had a wonderful voice, and he was very calm and assuring so he would answer the phone late at night so nobody else would want to work as he had nowhere else to go.

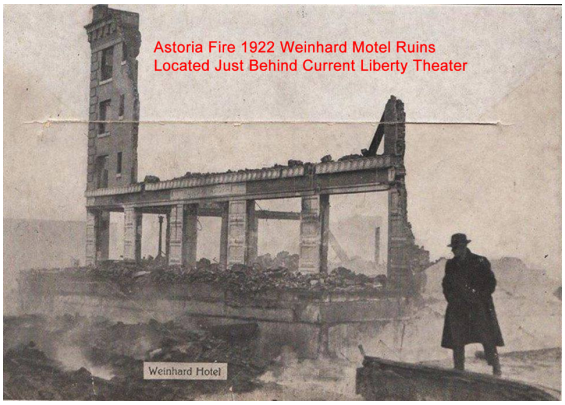
8. 12th and Commercial

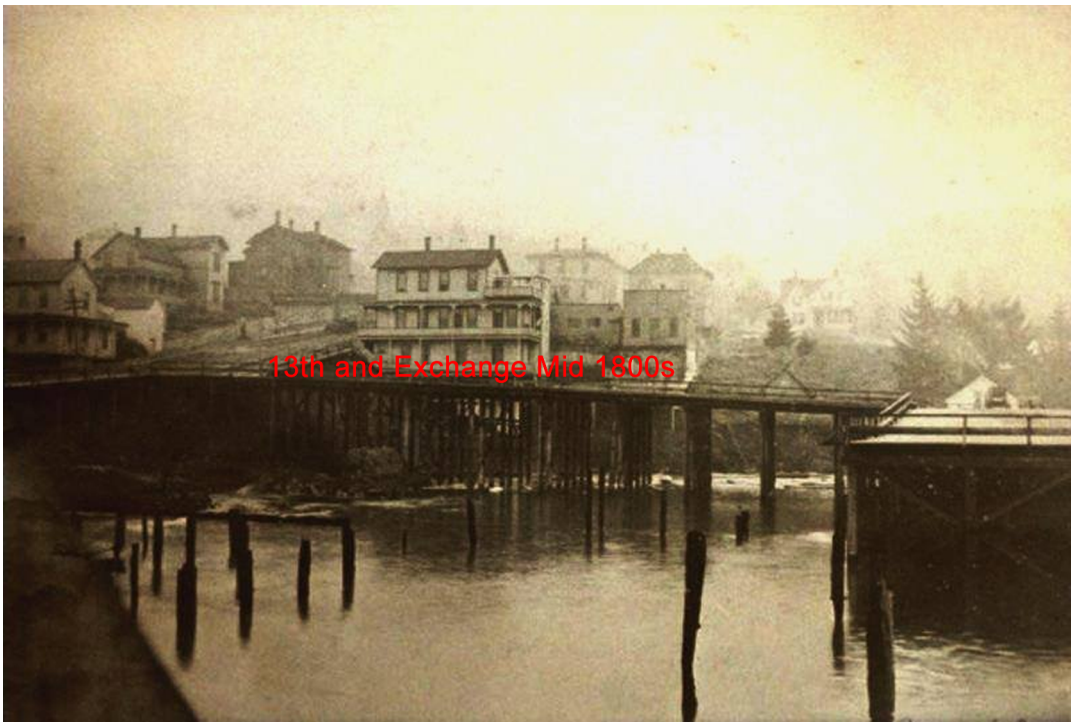
Although known collectively as the Associated Building, there are three sections-Hobson, Copeland, and Carruthers that take up this side of the block. It was one of the first buildings built after the fire and is most notable in that the Copeland Bldg. rests next to the State Hotel where we started our walk and the source of the 1922 fire. The Hobson Building is Butches for Men. It was here that the clowns would go into the tunnels and come up through a manhole cover to come out the small outhouse they used for parades.

Courtesy of Clatsop County Historical Society
After the Great Fire of 1922, city streets were again raised above former tide flats. Chairwall construction was used to retain sand fill. This 1923 photograph shows 12th and Commercial Streets before they were filled.

The Caruthers restaurant on the corner is like a hip hotel lobby with double-high ceilings, art deco — with clean, stark lines, icy, bold colors, and ornate flourishes — rules the day. There is marble — real and faux — plus plenty of low-light sources, gargantuan gold-rimmed mirrors, delicate stemware and so on. It's all about mood, and that mood invokes two things: high-society and metropolitan style. That there's a cocktail named the Clark Gable says just about everything you need to know.

Across the street is the Liberty Theater. The second largest project to date in the history of Astoria was announced on April 4, 1924. Contractor Henry Makela began the work of driving piling for the north half of the building in June 1924. The foundation of the Weinhard-Astoria Hotel, which was destroyed by the 1922 fire, was to be used for the south half. *Anyone know who the Weinhard's were?* A building permit in the amount of $135,000 was issued on July 28, 1924, and construction began on that date. The Astor Building was completed early in 1925, and the beautiful Liberty Theater was formally opened on April 4th taking up most of the city block. Although it had significantly deteriorated The Friends of Liberty Theater started restoration of the Liberty Theatre in April of 2005. The restoration of the Liberty Theatre Complex has been crucial from an historic preservation perspective. Outside of Portland or Salem, there was no other 1920s vintage motion picture palace in Oregon restored to its original decorative architectural.





Courtesy of the Clatsop County Historical Society

Trolley tracks were warped by heat from the Great Astoria Fire of 1922, seen here looking south on 14th Street. The Lovell Garage, upper left, survived the fire and was opened immediately for receiving and distributing donations from Portland. It also became a site for meals.

Tour Notes:

Underground Tour Part Two **Pages 1 and 2**

Start of Underground tour part 2 at Pit State Hotel (1)

Start of fire at State Hotel

Copeland Investment Hart Hotel 1924-1934 then State Hotel

Tell Story about Astoria Fire. 12-8-1922, 2500 homeless(25%)

2 deaths. Business Man saving cars and Hanging out of fright

Losses were bad Xmas Stock 2000 homeless 14% of entire town

All Grocery Stores burnt as well as banks.

WA Residents looked in Horror as their money burn up.

24 solid blocks burnt up 9th to 15th and Exchange to Water

KKK thought to be cause by Hanging and set fire to hide deed.

Panic had people running little on, Toothbrush and vase only

Milk man was Paul Revere of Astoria.

Fire not first 2 July 1983 burnt most of water front

11th and Marine Drive on way to corner of 11th and Marine (2) Up Ramp sidewalk Marine before crossing.

Sears BLDG (City Transfer Bldg) art deco style 1925-29

Maki Bldg (Restoration Hard Ware) Moderne Style mid 1930s

Astoria has mostly both styles

Corner 11th and Marine Drive Riviera Bldg(3)

COLUMBIAN THEATRE (post-fire). This used to be the Riviera Theatre.

Built 1925 crenelated parapet, Med roof tiles and arched openings.

Many remember watching multiple shows for nickel.

Walk down to foot of 11th

Foot of 11th and River (4)

Railroad Trestle sense of the planked streets of per fire.

Story about little girl Nancy *arrive from Portland afraid then got into it.*
Streets not filed till 1915 and area of fire till after 1922 fire.
Show Picture of Filled in Roads 1915 and 1922
Directly west of Pier 11 stood PARKERS old dock (1851). First in city.
Pier 11 is a SANB0RN WAREHOUSE (Pre-fire) located on FLAVEL'S DOCK. Feed store and passenger dock came up stairs from river.
SANBORN BUILDING. Only full block building in Astoria.
Used to be Amato Supper Club top eating/dancing place during WW2.
East towards Pier 12. Example of what most DT was prior to fire.
Talk about sea wall was built and how they filled the streets. Good time to show **13th & exchange picture** *and* **Picture of Fire 1922** *and* **Astoria Venice**
Walk along Trestle and indicate the next section we will talk about Crimps, Shanghai, Houses of Ill-reputed and drinking establishments.

Corner of 10th and Astor (5)

West from this point was the part of town that most church going folks did not frequent. Known as Swill Town.
Famous for its saloons and female boarding houses.
Tell Story about liquor robberies and Swill Town. Choice of Vigilantes Hang or leave town.
Home of the cribs, crimps, pimps, and toss pots.
Cribs were the little cubbyholes the prostitutes performed their services
Crimps were the toughs who kidnapped and shanghaied men.
We all know what **pimps** are.
Talk about trap doors and garbage and drunk sailors.
Their were 40 saloons in 1877. Oh Yea almost forgot.
"**Toss pots**" were what the ladies of the night called drunks.
Tell story about embalming fluid and dead sailors.Flying Princes, Snug Harbor Saloon, Bunko Kelly, 24 drunks, wheelbarrows and $5 a head
Across the Transit Center you can see the **Smoke House Butcher Block**. Originally built before the fire by **Anna Messenger** as a hotel with retail stores underneath.
Tell story Douglas Hotel, Son Hardware store and need a screw.
Building Survived fire, reflective of styles during the historic period.
Last surviving brothel in Astoria's Red-Light District.
1918 U.S. Government told Astoria to clean up or would boycott it.
1924 the Grand Jury found the moral conditions in Astoria appalling.
Red-light district on Astor Street thrived well into the 40's and 50's
Many liked the RL dist. Because daughters and wives safe from rape.
Story of Catholic students selling Raffle tickets ended when one of the Madams showed up for the drawing.

Continued pages 3 and 4

Corner of 10th and Marine (6)

Talk about the Shanghaiers Bridget Grant and sons, Jim Turk, Larry Sullivan and Bunko Kelly
Debunk trap doors. Boarding homes better drug hold and have runner sign them up. Then cops can help them enforce
Tell Story of Bridget Grant and her eight boys

Corner of 10th and Commercial (6)go under awning Allen Building

Economy in Astoria tanked by early 80's. Run down/ people leaving
Dropped from 14k in twenties to less than 10k in 1983.
By 1987 Astoria realized things needed to change…

Downtown Historical District includes 130 buildings
89% of the buildings were built before 1947.
Only 23 buildings had been built new up to 1998 8 compatibles.
Commercial North Facades continuous from 8th to 14th
90% of buildings 2nd period of Development 1923 - 1947
As of 1998 only 20 BLDGS have been destroyed since 1922
In 1998 all 133 bldgs. were placed on the National Register
Gave the city the ability to provide financial resources for businesses to improve their properties and reclaim the historical look of the original city
Three Bldgs example of how over last 20 years we changed a "used to be town" into the gem you see today.
SW corner Sanborne BLDG 1923 had façade covered for B of A no hist. value. Using programs like the Special Assessment program and other federal and local grants they converted back like before.
Special Assessment is a discounted Prop Tax 10YRS to use for cost to meet Historical Standards. Example Astor hotel has saved ½ a million
NW corner Allen BLDG. Diamonds in the Rough they were able to return it to its original look. **Show pictures of 2007 and today**
This is when we discuss the Transoms and how they work.
Beaver Lodge of Odd Fellows rebuilt January 1923 2 MO after fire.
First fireproof lodge structure to be dedicated in Astoria since the fire
Example of style of building built after with most of its original style
Can anyone tell me who were members of the Odd Fellows Lodge?
Between 11th and 12th on Commercial (7)
Salon Verve was called The Commercial Barber Shop.
original barber shop where **Jack the Cat** shined shoes downstairs.
Show pictures chair and Jack
12th and Commercial (8)
Talk about Associated Bldg includes Copeland, Hobson and Caruthers
Copeland has State Hotel behind it where this tour began.
Hobson Butches for Men. Entry to underground for Clown Outhouse
Show picture Out House and tell story if not in Part 1.
Caruthers restaurant hip hotel lobby with double-high ceilings, art deco — with clean, stark lines, icy, bold colors and ornate flourishes — rules the day. There is marble — real and faux — plus plenty of low-light sources, gargantuan gold-rimmed mirrors, delicate stemware and so on. It's all about mood, and that mood invokes two things: high-society and metropolitan style. That there's a cocktail named the Clark Gable says just about everything you need to know.
This is time to show the Picture of chairwalls and Carruthers Bldg.
Across the street is the Liberty Theater. The second largest project to date in the history of Astoria was announced on April 4, 1924.
Pile Drive North side back used foundation old Weinhard Motel.
Anyone know who the Weinhard's were?
Henry Makela was contractor building permit in the amount of $135,000 was issued on July 28, 1924
Completed in early 1925
The beautiful Liberty Theater was formally opened on April 4th taking up most of the city block (known as the Astor Bldg..
During the 80s and 90s it deteriorated significantly.
The Friends of Liberty Theater started restoration of the Liberty Theatre in April of 2005.

The restoration of the Liberty Theatre Complex has been crucial from an historic preservation perspective. Outside of Portland or Salem, there was no other 1920s vintage motion picture palace in Oregon restored to its original decorative architectural.

This is time to close things down. Take any one back to beginning.